

Loving God, be in my speaking, and in all our listening. Amen.

Well, they finally let me get up in the pulpit.

Can I just say what a joy it has been for Sara and me to be with you on placement this year – its been a blessing to come here each Sunday – so thanks to you all for making us feel so welcome among you.

As Linda said last week, I get to preach today because its Vocations Sunday – ordinands around the country are asked to talk about their call to the priesthood. Now before you think I'm going to give you some kind of party political broadcast – and you start reaching instinctively for the TV remote control to change channels - let me say that's not my intention at all.

I want to talk about the vocation of every Christian, and also the vocation of every congregation. I'll then touch on our weekday vocation at work, and then finally say something about my own personal call to ordination. Four topics, then – and I intend to throw out a challenge to you with each one.

First, the vocation, or calling, of every Christian.

Our gospel reading from Matthew today on your sheet gives a picture of Jesus out in the mission field – going about preaching, teaching and healing. Matthew then names the twelve disciples and says that Jesus sent them out to do what Jesus himself had been doing – proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.

Now these disciples were a rag bag mixture of people - Peter who was always opening his mouth and putting his foot in it – James and John arguing – Matthew a hated tax collector – and doubting Thomas.

Jesus called them – and then told them to go out and do what he had been doing. A large collective intake of breath no doubt followed. But off they went.

I have a poster on my study wall with the words “Do it, then fix it as you go”. The sub-heading is: “Too many people spend too much time trying to perfect something before they actually do it. Instead of waiting for perfection, run with what you've got, and fix it as you go.” None of us is any different from the rag bag of the first disciples. But each of us can get out there and respond to Jesus' call, like the first disciples did. Not perfectly, but if we wait for perfection then we'll never do anything.

The Christian life is not about being perfect, nor even about being good, but about following, responding to the call of Jesus.

So my first challenge is to everyone here this morning – what is God calling you to do for Him that you need to follow up on in some way? Don't think you aren't good enough, or not ready.

Do it, then fix it as you go.

And don't give up. Don't let the fear of failure hold you back, either.

My second point is that I believe God calls every church congregation, and has a vocation for each one as a body. How often do we think that an organisation has a particular character? Some are welcoming, some off-putting. Or some seem happy go lucky, while others are formal or staid. We say they have a particular ethos or culture. The same is true of churches – the parish profile for the vacancy here was trying to say what was special about Holy Trinity – what made it different from other Anglican churches.

Now look at the start of the letter to the church at Ephesus from our Revelation reading, and indeed when I looked at all seven of these letters, something intriguing hit me. Each letter is not actually addressed to the church, but to the angel of the church, and every time it says “your works...your toil...your endurance” – that’s you singular, not you plural. The letters are to the angel.

Now the angel of the church not only has a particular character, but a vocation as well. That’s what Walter Wink argues in his ground breaking book “The Powers That Be” about the principalities and powers mentioned by Paul in his letters. Wink says, “The angel of the church is the coincidence of what the church is – its personality – and what it is called to become – its vocation”

What, then, is the vocation of the angel of Holy Trinity – where are you going? What is your calling? In my previous job in Birmingham, before I came to college here in Oxford, I used to advise churches about their community engagement, and help them work out a strategy and plan for mission and neighbourhood regeneration.

So my second challenge - and it is directed to the angel of this church (not to any individual or group of individuals) – is to find out not just who you are and where you are, but what you are called to become. My challenge is for you to know your community better, and to have a strategy for engagement in mission to it.

My third point is about vocation as work – paid or not. What will we be doing this time tomorrow? How are we using our God given gifts in our everyday lives? How do we find out what God wants us to be doing? How should we earn a living? And how do we live Christian lives in the midst of the everyday?

There’s no doubt in my mind that the working world is important to God – each week in the Eucharist service we bring forward bread and wine that are both the “work of human hands”. At the end of the service we ask to be sent out to “life and work to God’s praise and glory.” Lesslie Newbigin once said that “The primary action of the church in the world is the action of its members in their daily work.”

My challenge on vocation and the working week is for you to review how you feel supported as a Christian at work, and maybe how you maintain an effective work/life balance. I’ve listed some resources to help get you thinking more about this on the back of the readings sheet.

Finally we get round to me. Why am I standing up here? How do I feel called to ordination?

A key part of my story is that in our previous church the vicar (Graham) left after 19 years. We then started what proved to be an 18 month interregnum. I was involved in making church happen Sunday by Sunday, and I started to feel that there was a priest-shaped hole that maybe I could fill. I had always felt that I couldn’t do what Graham did, couldn’t preach like Graham did. But when he wasn’t there any more, I realised that I could do what

I could do. I could find my voice – and maybe I had something to say.

My guess is that there may be some of that feeling among you here at Holy Trinity during this interregnum – you can't do what Tom did – the new vicar won't do what Tom did - actually no one else can – but that doesn't mean there isn't a job for each of us. For some that might be the ordained ministry of the priesthood – but your personal call may be something else. My challenge to you on this is not to be put off because you can't do what someone else does. Rather think what you can do for God, and don't compare yourself with others.

To recap, then, we are all called by God to active service – and there's no retirement from the Christian life. The angel of each and every church has a vocation, and we are each challenged individually to work out our own calling both on Sunday and in our working lives.

I pray that God will help you carry out your own God-given vocation.

Do it and fix it as you go.

Amen.